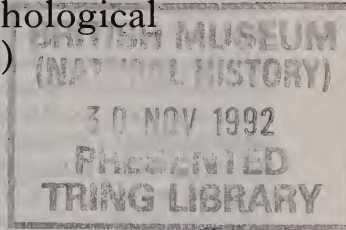


Status and future activities of the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature of the International Ornithological Committee (IOC)

by *Walter J. Bock*¹

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Introduction

Central to the work of all ornithologists is a set of universal and stable names for the organisms they study. This problem is well known and appreciated by those committees² currently developing lists of vernacular names for birds, be these names, English, German, French or Spanish. Biologists have long recognized the importance of a universal, stable set of scientific names for organisms and in the early years of the 19th century had begun development of procedures and codes regulating the acceptance and use of these names. This was not an easy task and several different sets of rules, such as the Strickland and the American Ornithologists' Union Codes, gradually developed and were used by diverse groups of zoologists during the 19th century. Important procedural changes occurred during this period, such as the date to accept for the start of zoological nomenclature, different workers accepting differing starting dates. Some workers accepted pre-Linnaean names, and others used the 1st edition of Linnaeus as the beginning of zoological nomenclature. Most workers during the first half of the 19th century accepted the 12th edition of Linnaeus (1766) as the beginning of zoological nomenclature, but gradually during the second half of the 1800s, the 10th edition of Linnaeus (1758) became widely accepted, and by the end of the century was used by almost all zoologists as the onset of zoological nomenclature. These diverse concepts and practices of nomenclature, involving rules of priority, led to major instability and lack of universality in scientific names for animals. Indeed many of the most muddled nomenclature problems in birds resulted from these different nomenclatural procedures, not from the discovery of previously unknown names. In 1890, the International Congress of Zoology, the only truly international group representing all zoologists, established an International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) and charged this body with formulating a code of nomenclature acceptable to all

¹Chairman, SCON; Member, International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature; Secretary, International Ornithological Committee.

²At the International Ornithological Congress in New Zealand at Christchurch in 1990, the IOC established 2 standing committees to work on world lists of vernacular names of birds. One committee under the chair of Burt Monroe, Jr. will work on a list of English names for birds and the other under the chair of Henri Ouellet will work on French names. Any group of international ornithologists interested in establishing a similar subcommittee to work on world lists of names of birds in other languages should contact the author.

zoologists; but not until 1902 was a unified code of zoological nomenclature adopted by the International Congress of Zoology (ICZN 1902). It was edited and published as "*Règles Internationales de la Nomenclature Zoologique*" in 1905 (Blanchard 1905). These Règles were amended many times up to 1930, but not thereafter, and had become seriously out-of-date by the time of the 1948 Paris zoological congress. Hence, the ICZN decided that a complete revision of the Règles was needed. A full 20 years were devoted to this revision which was finally adopted by the 15th International Congress of Zoology, London, 1958 and, after extensive editing, was published as the '*International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*' (ICZN 1961), which exists today in the 3rd edition (ICZN 1985) and is generally called by zoologists interested in zoological nomenclature the 'Code'.

Although these codes have served admirably to regulate the acceptance and use of scientific names, many problems both general and particular still exist. Among these is the fact that ornithologists need to know several names for most species, genera and families of birds if they are searching the literature for information on a particular taxon. For example, if one is interested in finding information on the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in the 19th century literature, one must remember to look under the name *Strix*, by which this bird was known for most of the 1800s as well as *Hybris* and *Aluco*. The family-group name Strigidae was applied to all owls or, if subgroups were recognized, to the barn owls for most of the last century. The generic name *Procellaria* and the family-group name Procellariidae was applied to either the storm-petrels or to the shearwaters for much of the 19th century, depending who was the author. The generic name *Colymbus* Linnaeus, 1758 and the family-group name Colymbidae represented an especially recalcitrant nomenclatural problem. European workers applied these names to the divers or loons, while North American ornithologists used them for the grebes, the difference in use depending on interpretation of unclear taxonomic and nomenclatural decisions made by Brisson in 1760. This problem was analysed in great detail by Salomonsen (1951) at the 1948 International Ornithological Congress, Helsinki, 1948, his paper leading to an application to the ICZN for a plenary decision. This resulted in *Colymbus* being suppressed and the names *Gavia* for the divers and *Podiceps* for the grebes being conserved along with the associated family-group names. But more importantly, Salomonsen's presentation to the 10th ornithological congress resulted in the formation of the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature (SCON).

Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature

The first SCON was elected by members of the 10th International Ornithological Congress attending a special meeting arranged after the presentation of Professor Salomonsen's paper (Proc. Xth Internat. Ornith. Cong. 154). The original members were J. Berlioz (France), R. Meinertzhagen (UK), E. Stresemann (Germany) and J. Zimmer (USA) under the chairmanship of Richard Meinertzhagen. The first detailed report of this committee was presented by Salomonsen at the 12th

Congress (Salomonsen 1960); but the committee had been most active from its earliest beginnings.

The SCON functions under the authority of the International Ornithological Committee (IOC), the international body of ornithologists responsible for the International Ornithological Congresses. As with other standing committees acting under the IOC, the members of the SCON from the first have been appointed every 4 years shortly after the close of an ornithological congress by the new president. Appointments are made on the basis of the recommendation of the chairman of the previous SCON, which is formulated by discussion among the members of the committee. Dr. Eugene Eisenmann (American Museum of Natural History) served on this committee for many years including as its chairman, a position he held at the time of his death in October 1981. When informed in December 1981 of Dr. Eisenmann's death, Professor L. von Haartman, President of the 18th ornithological congress, appointed W. J. B. to this committee and asked if he would serve as its chairman. He has served in that capacity until the present time. Currently the SCON is composed of 14 members, as follows: Walter J. Bock, *Chairman* (USA), Murray D. Bruce (Australia), David Holyoak (UK), Ernst Mayr (USA), Gerlof F. Mees (The Netherlands), Burt Monroe, Jr. (USA), Hiroyuki Morioka (Japan), Henri Ouellet (Canada), D. Stefan Peters (Germany), Richard Schodde (Australia), L. S. Stepanyan (USSR), Karel H. Voous (The Netherlands), David Wells (Federation of Malaysia), and Hans E. Wolters (Germany) [†December 1991].

The SCON serves as an advisory body on matters of avian nomenclature. In this capacity, it holds open meetings at ornithological congresses to discuss current nomenclatural problems including pending applications before ICZN, to reach decisions on these matters and to chart its actions for the next 4 years. These meetings are open to all members of the congress, who are encouraged to take full part in the deliberations. Between congresses, the SCON remains active, dealing with nomenclatural problems as they develop and, when necessary, writing applications for submission to the ICZN and comments on pending applications.

The SCON also serves as an information source for avian biologists on all matters of ornithological nomenclature, including interpretation of the Code, assisting in the analysis of particular nomenclatural problems and helping in the writing of applications to the ICZN. *The SCON is most anxious to interact with individual ornithologists and with national check-list committees, and would appreciate being informed of all nomenclatural problems being considered by individuals and national committees.* Unfortunately this interaction is at a far lower level than the SCON would prefer. All ornithologists and all national check-list committees are urged to inform the SCON, either the Chairman directly or any member, of all questions on ornithological nomenclature being discussed. Greater interaction between the SCON and the ornithologists would result in better nomenclatural decisions and more stable scientific names for birds.

Through the Specialist Subcommittee on Ornithological Nomenclature the SCON also serves as an advisory body to the ICZN on matters of avian nomenclature. It reviews all applications published in the

Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature and submits its recommendations and opinions to the ICZN. Although the SCON has pressed for a greater role as a Specialist Subcommittee since 1982 and although the ICZN is strongly in favour of the development of these specialist advisory groups, the Secretariat of the ICZN has shown considerable reluctance to use such specialist advisory groups. However, the SCON believes strongly the Specialist Subcommittees are in a better position than the ICZN to deal with nomenclatural matters restricted to particular groups of animals. The SCON will continue to develop its role as a Specialist Subcommittee under the ICZN.

The Secretariat of the ICZN (c/o International Commission Zoological Nomenclature, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, U.K.; Dr. Philip K. Tubbs, Executive Secretary and Editor, *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*) serves as the administrative body of the Commission. All inquiries about the work of the Commission, applications to the ICZN, questions about nomenclatural problems, orders for publications of the Commission should be addressed to the Secretariat. Inquiries about ornithological nomenclature can also be addressed directly to the SCON. The Secretariat, ICZN publish quarterly the *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*, now in its 48th volume. All applications to the ICZN, comments on these applications, decisions by the ICZN and discussions about zoological nomenclature appear in their Bulletin. In addition, the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1985, 3rd edition; £19.00 or \$35.00), the Official Lists and Indexes of Names and Works in Zoology (1987; £60.00 or \$110.00) and its supplements may be ordered from the Secretariat.

Family-group names

With the publication of the new Code, family-group names were subjected to considerably greater regulation, including extending priority to these names. Unfortunately the new Code did not contain a clear *stare decisis* (= "grandfather") clause, and many workers chose to overlook its finer details. The changes to the rules of nomenclature were made with little analysis of their effect on existing and often well-established family-group names, but, and it must be emphasized, these changes in the new Code (ICZN 1961) affecting family-group names are far more complex than the simple extension of priority to these names. The Code is quite clear that the application of priority to family-group names was *not* to be used to upset established names, and it should be noted that it clearly states that names for taxa above the family-level are not covered by the rules of zoological nomenclature. With high probability, the Code will not be extended to names for these higher level taxa.

Beginning with the 1962 congress in Ithaca, NY, the SCON expressed its concern on the effects of the extension of priority in the new rules on many well-established family-group names of birds which did not possess priority. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to declare a list of well-established family-group names for the Oscines (see Salomonsen 1960: 38–39), but such broad-based applications were never accepted by the Secretariat of the ICZN. A few individual family-group names, such as

Thraupinae, Cardinalinae and Drepanididae, were conserved. However, nothing further was done for 20 years because of the daunting prospects of searching out all the avian family-group names in the old literature.

At the meeting of the SCON during the 1982 ornithological congress, Moscow, the decision was reached that the SCON would take proper action to resolve the problem of avian family-group names (Bock 1985). I undertook the task to research the history of these names and to prepare a list of family-group names published for avian families using the standard classification in Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World*. A draft of this list of names was presented at the 1986 congress, Ottawa, where the SCON voted to complete this project and to publish the list of avian family-group names of Recent birds (Bock 1989). A final draft (Bock, in prep) was circulated to members of the SCON and other interested ornithologists just prior to the 1990 congress, Christchurch, and this list and future action by the SCON were discussed at the open meeting there. Copies of this final draft are available to interested ornithologists by writing to me. Over 1200 family-group names are available for Recent birds (i.e. those covered in Peters' Check-list); the list does not include names for families of fossil birds. After this list is published, an application will be made to the ICZN, requesting that this list of avian family-group names be declared as the base-line for all future nomenclatural decisions of avian family-group names for Recent birds. The names on this list, with their authors and dates of publication, by such declaration will be fixed; and names not on this list will be declared not available for purposes of zoological nomenclature for Recent birds. These actions are in line with the current thinking of the ICZN, which is to encourage the development of lists of available names for groups of animals, and to fix these lists as the only names available for each group.

Generic names

Following discussion of the list of family-group names, the SCON considered the general concept advocated by the ICZN to develop lists of available names for groups of animals. The group approved of this approach and proposed a resolution for consideration by the IOC at its meeting. This resolution which was approved by the IOC reads as follows:

'WHEREAS the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature has the difficult central role in insuring maximum ease of communication between zoologists by insuring the stability and universality of names for the diverse organisms studied by the zoologists, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the International Ornithological Committee at its meetings during the XX International Ornithological Congress, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2-9 December 1990 congratulates and supports the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in its efforts to increase continuity of zoological nomenclature by the conservation and stabilization of established names and directs its Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature to assist the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in these efforts.

MOREOVER, the International Ornithological Committee recognizes and congratulates the pioneering actions of the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature in developing a list of available family-group names of birds and urges this committee to undertake similar projects on genus-group and species-group names of birds.'

In connection with this resolution, Murray Bruce said that he was developing a computer-based data bank of generic names for birds. The SCON discussed the possibility of undertaking a project of completing this list of available generic names for birds similar to that completed for family-group names, publishing it and applying to the ICZN to declare this list as the base-line for all future nomenclatural decisions on generic names for Recent birds. This project was approved and Murray Bruce and Walter Bock were directed to consider ways to complete the project after the list of family-group names was finished.

Delays in actions taken by the ICZN

Many members of the SCON and other ornithologists have expressed serious concern about the long waits on applications submitted to the ICZN, delays arising in the work of the Secretariat. For example, the application on conserving the family-group name Threskiornithidae was submitted in 1975 and published only in 1984; but to date it has not been submitted to the membership of ICZN for their vote. The application to conserve the generic name *Cacatua* was published in 1964, with a substitute set of requests published in 1965. Although ornithologists have agreed informally to use this name, the Secretariat of the ICZN delayed a vote for apparently rather trivial reasons. After a full discussion of these and other cases, the SCON voted to urge the ICZN and its Secretariat to speed the measures by which applications are processed, published and final action taken by the ICZN. Further, the SCON urged the ICZN and its Secretariat to increase its use of the SCON as a specialist advisory committee and to submit to the SCON for its consideration all applications, upon receipt, dealing with birds. At the same time, ornithologists are strongly urged to interact with the SCON in their analysis of possible nomenclatural matters and in the development of applications for submission to the ICZN.

Because ornithologists rarely contact the SCON on nomenclatural analyses they have undertaken, and usually do not inform the SCON of their individual applications and comments submitted to the ICZN, the SCON does not and cannot have a good appreciation of the magnitude of this problem of delays. For example, we do not know of, or how many, applications on avian nomenclatural matters have been submitted to the ICZN and are still unpublished. Therefore, all ornithologists are urged to keep the SCON informed of their correspondence with the ICZN, including where possible sending copies of all applications and comments and of all correspondence with the Secretariat. The SCON would appreciate learning of any problems, including delays in publications, extensive editing of applications and comments in which real changes of meaning occurred.

Scientific names used for birds affect the work of all ornithologists, and the SCON is dedicated to the central goal of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, as expressed clearly in its Preamble, namely the maximum stability and universality of these names. This goal can best be reached by full cooperation between all ornithologists. The SCON appreciates the offer of the British Ornithologists' Club to present this

report of its recent activities and we hope that its publication will encourage ornithologists worldwide to interact more with the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature and its work.

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Address: Dr. Walter J. Bock, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA